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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000174

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/04/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION SOCIETIES TO HOLD CONSTITUTIONAL  
CONFERENCE

REF: A. MANAMA 111

[B](#). 04 MANAMA 683

[C](#). 04 MANAMA 237

Classified by DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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The Constitutional Conference  
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[1](#). (SBU) On February 10, four opposition political societies, known as the Quartet Alliance, will hold a conference entitled "Contractual Constitution for a Constitutional Monarchy." Conference attendees will discuss means of promoting constitutional reform in the kingdom, including petitions, drafting an alternative constitution, and protest rallies. The Alliance, composed of Al Wifaq, Al Amal Al Islami, National Democratic Action Society, and Al Tajamo' Al Qowmi, boycotted the 2002 parliamentary elections and have not changed their official policy more than two years later. They say that they will boycott the fall 2006 parliamentary elections unless they are granted a dialogue with the King or his representative on amending the constitution. Society members told the press February 5 that police had confiscated posters and banners advertising the conference.

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The Constitutional Dialogue  
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[2](#). (SBU) The Alliance contends that the 2002 Constitution is illegitimate and grants too much legislative authority to the King and the executive branch. They say the country's 1973 Constitution, which was suspended in 1975, granted the elected parliament more power and is the only legitimate constitution. In September 2004, the Alliance and Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Dr. Majeed Al Alawi (currently the Minister of Labor), who represented the government, launched a constitutional dialogue. The dialogue quickly broke down with no progress.

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Efforts to Present Petition to King  
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[3](#). (SBU) The societies claim they have gathered 75,000 signatures on a petition calling for modifications to the 2002 Constitution. The societies presented a request on January 18 to the Royal Court to meet the King to discuss the petition. The Royal Court replied instructing them to meet instead with the parliament, which the government considers to be the proper forum for discussing amendments to the constitution rather than in an outside-the-system negotiation. Al Wifaq's President Sheikh Ali Salman said "it is the authorities' duty to receive any letter or petitions from citizens according to the constitution," referencing an article in the 1973 Constitution. In an example of political theater, the Alliance sent the petition twice to the King, first via registered mail and later by regular mail; the Royal Court refused to accept the petition both times. February 5 newspapers report that the Minister of the Royal Court invited several deputies to a meeting to discuss the court's refusal to accept the petition.

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Comment  
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[4](#). (C) The Alliance's threat to boycott the 2006 elections is likely more of a political bargaining tool than an actual plan. Privately, many in the opposition societies' leadership support full participation in the next elections (Ref A). The National Democratic Institute (NDI) representative in Bahrain, Fawzi Guleid, told PolOff the Alliance is hoping for some sort of compromise with the King. It would like to see 10 out of the 40 normally GOB-appointed Shura Council seats up for election, for example, or a similar gesture of increased popular participation. In press reports on February 6, National Assembly Society Chairman Abdullah Hashem called the constitutional conference "politically useless" and urged the opposition to work within the current political system. Given that the next parliamentary elections are more than a year and a half away, there is real hope that the King and the opposition can find some common ground on the constitution and parliament's

composition.  
MONROE